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According to the author, the chief duty of a teacher is "to do himself out of a job as quickly and efficiently as possible." If he were to take this aphorism seriously and consider instruction in terms of behavior changes in students, a teacher would be forced to re-examine his basic approaches to teaching. He might come to realize that his chief duty is not to transmit and discuss what has already been known but to train a student to think with increasing independence of a teacher. Other questions which he would have to consider are (1) whether students are actually treated as individuals in any concrete and productive sense, (2) the usefulness of the question-and-answer pattern in examinations and discussions, (3) the value of small classes and a low student-faculty ratio, (4) the value of covering large amounts of material, and (5) the wisdom of thinking in all-or-nothing terms when developing new approaches to teaching. In conclusion the author describes how he teaches three writing courses in which 95 students write for every class session and in which he is able to have from 40 to 60 individual conferences a week. (BN)

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NEW APPROACHES TO TEACHING

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Let me confess that preparing this talk posed some special hazards. To begin with, it has been perhaps the single hardest piece of writing I have ever forced myself to do. And, a different kind of hazard, some of you have known me long enough - and have heard me talk often enough - that I didn't dare raid my back files for ideas. Also, because of the nature of this group, sharing as you do so many special problems, I felt a more than ordinary obligation to make this discussion something of value. Trying to think fresh thoughts about teaching is mind-wrenching labor, mainly because the subject is encrusted with unexamined traditions and self-persuading clichès. I felt, too, that although it might have been temporarily interesting to describe a few brief case histories of new teaching approaches in various colleges, it would be more useful in the long run if I could suggest some productive attitudes that faculty might take; and ask a few radical questions about some aspects of teaching that seem to us most obvious. "Radical" is from the Latin radix, "from the root," and it is in this sense that the questions are asked. The only new appro ches to teaching that will amount to anything are those which begin with new thoughts in the individual teacher's mind about instruction practices that appear, on the surface, to be obvious.

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There are few things more difficult than an analysis of the obvious; but that, with considerable diffidence, is what I propose to try to do in a moment. First, however, a brief comment about "innovation:" I shall use the word only four times. It is already jargon: it's the "in thing" to be talking about, to be seeking foundation grants for. If you haven't got an innovation or two incubating - or hatching - at your college, you're simply not with it. But the trouble with the term, and more usually with the state of mind behind it, is that too often mere novelty is mistaken for innovation. Though novelty is refreshing and necessary in the handling of a class or in an approach to subject material, it is not in itself a "new" approach. Many novel ways of stimulating a class are as foolproof as tickling a baby - and as useless! Too much preoccupation with the novel can quickly lead to mere frivolity. There are durable and vexing problems in instruction that do not yield to novel solutions.

What is most persistent in the teaching situation is the old and complicated challenge of getting the student genuinely involved in learning for herself. The loose and unsatisfactory term is motivation; but that word, too, has long since lost its meaning in the fogs of educational discussion and research. Put as baldly as possible: <u>it is the chief duty of a teacher to do himself out of a job as quickly and efficiently as possible.</u> This is an old aphorism, and like so many aphorisms, it reflects the truth. It is, in fact, the one central, energizing idea behind any new approaches to teaching. The rest of this discussion will explore some implications of what might happen to our teaching if we took the aphorism seriously.

The first practical step that faculty can take is to re-examine exhaustively, from as many angles as possible, a few taken-for-granted assumptions.

We assume, for example, that one primary responsibility is teaching students how to think. What, exactly, do we mean be that? (William James once remarked that "most so-called thinking has the quality of atrocious harmlessness.") We talk about "cognitive" or "conceptual" activity - dreadful verbal garbage which simply litters over the fact that we don't really know what that means, either. Traditionally, we have assumed that we are teaching thinking while teaching subject matter. But instruction designed simply to transmit what is already known; or to discuss, no matter how profoundly, what is known, often neglects at the same time to train the behavior - more accurately, the changes in behavior - that characterize a student who is learning to think with increasing independence of a teacher. The teaching strategy must be directed toward what a student is asked to do; how she is expected to act. For thinking is action; it is a complex set of behaviors, most usually responses to problems or unresolved situations. When a teacher begins to consider his instruction in terms of behavior changes in his students, he is almost forced to develop new approaches.

For example, it is not the teacher's function to be the medium through which the student experiences a subject. It is not the chemistry teacher's job to instruct his students in a subject called "chemistry." Rather, his first task - his only significant task - is to lead his students

to behave like chemists so that they can then proceed to learn the subject for themselves. For instance, the purpose of a laboratory demonstration is, or should be, to exemplify a mode of action and a technique of approach to a problem; it should not be merely a "live" presentation of a textbook experiment, with the "solution" as the climax. Similarly, if the students spend most of their time following detailed directions in a laboratory manual, they are, in fact, learning better how to follow detailed directions in the laboratory manual. They are not necessarily learning how to apply the scientific method of thought in situations that are to them new ones. Rather, it is the teacher's obligation from the very first class to devise tactics that demand of his students increasingly sophisticated behavior sothat they can cope with - "think about" - the subject themselves, with less and less dependence on him. To teach a student to think is to teach her techniques of self-management in the area for which the instructor is responsible.

Said in another way: the faster a teacher can remove himself from the center of student attention, the more successfully he is likely to be instructing. The plain truth is that too many conscientious and well-meaning instructors are self-martyred by their own inefficiency. I affirm that the best teacher is, eventually, the lazy one: he works less and less hard as the year progresses, and his students work more and more usefully because he has taught them how to. Much of his hardest work has come before the first class meets in the fall: planning, designing, finding options for the ways he wants his students to learn to teach themselves. This preliminary work is often immensely difficult. It should

be at least a good half of an instructor's time and energy commitment before and during the academic year. It is also risky, because it means dropping familiar routines, turning one's attention from the subject matter to the student's relationship to the subject; and, finally, recognizing that his real day-to-day work consists of unremitting attention: sensitive, accurate, quickly responsive to the problems and the individual behavior of his students.

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A second assumption to be questioned, especially in colleges like ours, is whether, as we claim to do, we actually "treat students as individuals." I submit that most faculty in our schools do, indeed, attend with friendly concern to their students as persons. But whether they do so <u>professionally</u> is the question. For instance, it is still usual in our curriculums to use what could be called the "phalanx method," where it is standard practice for groups of students to be moved forward at the same speed, cover much of the same material in identical ways (with only minor variations), and reach the same passing points at the same time. The sight of an instructor, in the late spring, groaning homeward with an armload of term papers, is an example of his acceptance of the phalanx method, and an unconscious denial of what I am sure he thinks he believes: that each individual is different and could therefore be supposed to work at differing speeds. Yet the term papers were assigned at the same time, the deadline was set for a single time, and the papers will be "corrected" at the same time.

Again, the question in another context: do we evaluate students by the phalanx method, too? Yes, of course we do. But should we? Perhaps - BUT. I believe that students need evaluating, and constantly; I am not one who believes that getting rid of grades would be a good thing. But it is the timing and the kind of evaluation that needs re-thinking, so as to provide better for student differences, and especially to provide more efficient reinforcement for the learning of each student, at a time and in a way most useful for her as an individual.

Failure to provide realistically for differences among students is perhaps the greatest single source of inefficiency in teaching. For instance, many hard-working teachers pride themselves on returning papers covered with red marks and long, careful comments. The student, of course, looks first at the grade, and knows precisely where she stands. She may read the comments, too; but more typically than not, these are apt to identify error, query logic, or quality interpretation, and go little further. So the student knows where she stands - but she doesn't know what to do about it. And the teacher has labored to produce what is too often a contradictory or even a destructive result. The teacher's evaluating function should be that of a diagnostician - not a punishing judge. Like a good doctor, he should spot each student's most critical problems - one problem at a time, by the way - and give that student a prescription that can be effective <u>for her at that time</u>. Students are confused enough, and aware enough of their own deficiencies, without having all of their weaknesses identified at once and the sum of the weaknesses given a D-minus.

Here's a story which has a message for instructors who want to devise new approaches for evaluating student work. A famous advertising executive gave his staff an assignment and when they passed it in he took it home and brought it back the next morning. He called the authors into his office, placed the unmarked presentation before them and said, "Is this the best you can do?" The people gave excuses and said they didn't have the time, or they didn't have enough information, but of course they could do better. Then he gave the presentation back to them. This pattern was repeated until finally they said, Yes, that was the best they could do. Then he said, "All right, now I will read it."

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Another assumption to be looked at critically is the usefulness of the questions-and-answers pattern, in everything from examinations to the so-called "Socratic" dialogue in small seminars. (I would remind you that Socrates knew the answers to the questions he asked, and his technique was to lead his students to his answers.) An appallingly wasteful amount of instruction consists in providing answers to questions that have not even been asked. Question-answer is such a familiar part of instruction that it scarcely occurs to us to ask why this should be so. Yet answers to questions is a relatively rare form of behavior outside of school. Outside of school, the person who devises the most appropriate approach to a problem, who knows now to ask the right question at the right time for the right reason, is the person who thinks productively. Answers nearly always shut off further questions. Yet it is almost exclusively in the schoolroom where "answering" is expected behavior.

What is more important is how a student acts in the face of an unanswered question, an unsolved problem. Just for example: would it not make more sense to reward the student who constructs a shrewd, penetrating, wide-ranging examination (a very tough job, as any experienced teacher knows) rather than to reward her for giving answers to an examination whose questions she had no part in formulating?

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One assumption that we make - indeed, it is almost a sales-pitch - is that a low student-faculty ratio and small classes are good things. Faculty especially cling to this assumption, with the rationalization that it "permits more individual attention." And this despite the fact that decades of educational research have not produced any reliable evidence that small classes and this kind of individual attention have made any difference in effectiveness of instruction at all.

Let's, for a moment, turn the small-classes assumption upside down. Suppose a faculty member thought in terms of increasing his productivity: teaching larger numbers of students more effectively and with every bit as much individual attention as he would give to a smaller group. This is a professional challenge of the most stringent sort. Only your best teachers would rise to it; and that is precisely the point, for you would want as many of your students as possible to be instructed by the best on your staff. Leave the small classes to the mediocre teacher whose mediocrity can thus be less widespread. And reward the productive teacher in proportion to his increased output. If, for example, he clearly saves you the expense of hiring another

part-time or even full-time instructor to "cover" added sections or special courses, pay him additionally a fair proportion of the saving to your budget. The carrot-and-stick motive works for teachers, too.

I affirm that teachers can increase their productivity without resort to expensive hardware. Closed circuit TV, the Skinner programmed machines, the dial-access retrieval systems, are, for the most part, beyond the financial reach of our institutions. And, in any case, they are only expensive clutter unless they are used with high professional skill. I strongly believe that the best instruction is done with a minimum of materials, but with maximum imaginative use of those materials in endlessly varied applications. "Being productive" for a teacher does not mean "work harder." On the contrary, it means designing better sequences of student experience for a more appropriate return: namely, the student's eventual independence of the instructor. After all, people need instruction only to the degree that they are unable to learn for themselves. The teacher is the one who, in the language of the behavioral scientist, "arranges the contingencies of reinforcement." Teaching is defined by the change induced in the student. Eventually - outside of school, people learn from each other, without being formally taught. (That, by the way, is just what you are doing by getting together here.)

Another assumption made by many teachers is that in any given course there is a certain amount of material to be "covered." Often the rationale behind the coverage is that "it's required for transfer," or - as in professionally-oriented courses - there may be state board exams or other licensing exams to prepare for.

Clearly, in any subject, there is always vastly more material than can possibly be dealt with in any one course. What to choose, and why? Or, suppose the instructor asked, instead: How much can we leave out? What do we not need to cover in this course? The second question he could ask is: What do I want my students to be able to do with this material? This question is related to the pace of a course, for example, because it may well be to the student's advantage to spend much time, at first, with a few basic skills and concepts so that she can then later deal more efficiently with more of the subject matter.

Two brief examples. Obviously, there are many subjects which require volumes of sheer brute memory work. The nursing student simply cannot avoid the need to fix indelibly in her mind the hundreds and hundreds of facts about anatomy that she must have to function later. The teacher of anatomy has one primary responsibility here: to show and lead the student to the most efficient ways to memorize and retain. Or, in a survey of literature course, the primary requirement is not the amount or sequence of the literary works read. It is the selection and treatment of those key readings which generate the most useful concepts; which teach the student how to read other material like it that is not "covered." It is not the teacher's job to insist upon maximum exposure to different types, periods, and styles of literature. Rather, it is his obligation to teach his students how to read, with discrimination, depth, and subtlety, a few - a very few - of those works which reward deeper and deeper penetration. These works then become part of the student's intellectual bone marrow - and are not

simply skimmed to pass a test. Too often, survey courses consist of what the teacher has read and feels comfortable with. Too often, the amount of reading required constitutes almost cruel and unusual punishment. For example, a survey course which requires of freshmen in the first seven weeks of the first semester to read two plays of Sophocles, one of Aeschylus, one of Euripides, the Book of Job and one other Old Testament book, and selections from Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and Seutonius, is almost to guarantee student confusion - to say nothing of intellectual indigestion. Too often, students - and their teacher, for that matter - do not have any clear idea why they are reading what they are. If you don't know where you're going, almost any road will take you there.

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One of the obstacles to developing new approaches to teaching is the tendency to think in all-or-nothing terms: to re-cast the whole college, change the schedule patterns, discard all current procedures. This is dislocation, not thoughtfully managed change. Changes in teaching practices are best accomplished, I think, in small, carefully planned segments or modules. "Think small" is far more practical than "think big." I don't suggest, however, that "thinking small" means taking years to make changes. Rather, the image comes to mind of the good bricklayer whose single bricks, set true and well-grouted, become the dependable wall - and one worth looking at in the bargain. I see no reason why, in most situations, the instructor who designs new practices cannot - especially at first - try them one at a time within the existing framework of the college's administrative set-up.

For example, if you will forgive one personal illustration, I have this year 95 students in three regular sections of English Composition - a load which the National Council of Teachers of English would frown upon. I like it. Next year, I'm going to ask the Dean for 125 students. In the first six weeks of this year, my students have written for <u>every</u> class. I am able to have from 40 to 60 individual conferences a week. My paper reading load up to now is less than half what it was a year ago. Best of all, in my judgment most of the students are writing better more quickly than I would have thought possible.

There's no magic in this; nor do I want in the least to sound self-serving. But one's own experience is, after all, what one knows best. Without going into too much detail, here are some of the elements in this approach.

Four premises dictate the design of student activity:

Premise #1: It is possible to present all of the formal content of a writing course - descriptions of the main skills a writer needs - in one fifty-minute class period. Every writer knows this. Every experienced writing teacher knows it. Thus, there is little point in continuous talk about writing.

Premise #2: The real content of a writing course is in the heads of the students.

Premise #3: The purpose of the course is to teach the students how to write clearly what they discover in themselves to say. It is not to be a literature course in which more reading and discussing than writing will be done.

Premise #4: Writing is learned while writing, and in no other way.

The fifty-minute, three-times-a-week class becomes a laboratory, a workshop, a continual series of individual conferences. Students work. The teacher is editor-in-residence. From time to time, writers come to the editor's desk with a problem. The problem is diagnosed but not solved. The writer goes back to try to solve it. The students spend the class hour working at being writers.

Once every two weeks, the students get a two-page dittoed memo from the editor. The memo summarizes writing problems identified to date and makes suggestions for solving the most important of these.

Periodically, a regular class day in replaced by a Tutorial Day. Students come to class only if they wish direct, extensive help from the instructor; other students are free not to attend.

Each student keeps all of her finished work in a file folder. From time to time she is asked to go back and either edit or rewrite an earlier piece of work. This is one way for her to get a perspective on her own progress - or lack of it.

When a student has written a piece which, in her judgment, is the best she has done to date, she hands it in, together with a tape cartridge which is hers alone. Later, the instructor talks on the tape to the student, analyzing her paper in depth, sometimes for as much as ten minutes of dictation - the equivalent of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 double-spaced typewritten pages of comment. Paper and tape are returned to the student, and she listens to the comments - over and over, if she wishes - on a playback machine in a library carrel.

For the first quarter, all work is ungraded. Writing skill is developed slowly, with difficulty, even with persistent hard work, and even with the best of students. Grades too early in this kind of course would only be distracting - or destructive. The student knows, anyhow, from the instructor's comments, "how she is doing."

Later this semester, and then continuously the rest of the year, each class section will "publish" - by ditto or mimeograph - some of the best (and a little, anonymously, of the worst) student work. Each student will, in this way, have a real, evolving, personal textbook to contribute to, mark up, study, and evaluate.

There is much more; but I think I have described enough so that the essential outlines of the approach are clear. I submit to you that every subject - any subject - can be analyzed and appropriate teaching practices developed which will capitalize on what you pay your instructors for: namely, their knowledge of their subject, their professional judgment as to what is important in the subject, and their ability to teach students how to learn in that subject. This means designing the learning work so that student and subject come most fruitfully together; so that the instructor becomes eventually what he should be: a resource, a participator in class work, not a dictator of it; and, in the last analysis, a person who has, within his own field of competence, helped other human beings manage themselves with increased skill and understanding.

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Finally, and almost as an aside, I have often had a little fantasy which - though it sounds silly on the face of it - has plagued me so that it has forced me to change many of my settled habits. Suppose a teacher said to himself, meaning it honestly: what would happen if I limited myself ruthlessly to no more than five minutes of talking to the whole class group at each meeting? What would we - note the plural - what would we do for the next 45 minutes? The more you go 'round this question, the more complex it becomes. I do believe that if enough teachers asked it seriously of themselves, there would be new approaches to teaching blossoming all over the place.

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You have recognized that, except for the brief outline of the writing course approach, I have not detailed any specific examples of new teaching methods. This was deliberate. Most often, innovations at one place are not really transferrable to another. What works at Goddard or Antioch or Shimer or Monteith or Bard would likely not work at all at Mt. Vernon or Westbrook or Green Mountain. Copy-cat changes are usually failures because the copiers are not the persons who originated that special kind of change, for one thing. One teacher's new approach may be another's catastrophe. Also, any viable changes in teaching practices must, in all realism, fit the particular character of the institution in which they are attempted. This is essentially a conservative prescription, and would not especially please the impatiently radical faculty member whose calls for reform are usually not accompanied by thorough, reasoned analysis of the reasons for changes and

the probable effects they may be expected to make. New ideas in education are plentiful and cheap. But the management of new ideas into productive practices is rigorous, demanding, and uncommon. This is why, in this discussion, I chose to question a handful of basic assumptions; and to suggest that each college faculty, or each teacher, might use the framework of questions and the attitudes of mind behind them to work toward his own new approaches to instruction.